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ECONOMIC GROWTH

(Economic Reform, Private Sector Development, Trade and Agriculture)

GMA orders fast-tracking of 148 infrastructure projects

(Source: Philippine Star News Online – 3/17/08)

President Arroyo has ordered the fast-tracking of the completion of 148 priority infrastructure projects, including 27 public works in Mindanao, through a stronger public-private sector partnership, a top Malacañang official said.

Presidential Management Staff chief Secretary Cerge Remonde issued the statement during the 3rd National Government Infrastructure Forum (NGIF) in Davao City on Saturday attended by business leaders, local government units, donor communities and investors, development stakeholders and civil society.

He said there is an urgent need to “unite on good infrastructure” which entails a multi-sectoral effort involving both public and private sector to build good infrastructure projects to spur growth and development in Mindanao.

“President Arroyo is fast-tracking the successful implementation of 148 priority infrastructure projects, including the 27 projects in Mindanao,” he said, adding “a stronger public-private partnership is a key.”

The government has allocated some P200 billion in additional funding for infrastructure projects in the 2008 General Appropriations Act, Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya Jr. said.

Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Secretary Jesus Dureza, who is also development champion for Mindanao, made a presentation on the updates of priority infrastructure projects in the region.

Of the 27 projects in Mindanao, three projects have been completed including the Diosdado Macapagal Bridge in Butuan, the 210-MW clean coal plant in Phividec, and the 950-KV photovoltaic powerplant in Cagayan de Oro.

Dureza expressed optimism that Mindanao's agribusiness industry will eventually exhibit a more bullish performance in the coming years.

He noted infrastructure projects are crucial in the physical integration of Mindanao which will optimize its potential as an Agri-Fishery Export Zone in the South.

Seven more projects in Mindanao will be completed this year, according to Remonde.

These projects are the Dinagat Island road and the airports in Zamboanga City, Butuan, Pagadian, Dipolog City, Ozamis City, Cotobato City and Laguindingan.

The government will also complete 271 small irrigation projects, which will provide water to 11,191 hectares of farmland and 33 farm-to-market (FMR) roads worth P252.59 million in Mindanao, Remonde said.

Remonde said Mrs. Arroyo has created the Pro-Performance System (PPS) to ensure the effective, efficient and transparent implementation of infrastructure projects.

The PPS Steering Committee is composed of Remonde, Ambassador Donald Dee, business representative; Ambassador Marita Magpili-Jimenez, representative for international development organizations; Dr. Vincent Fabella, NGO representative; Richard Nalupta, youth representative; Fr. Anton Pascual, religious representative; Ruperto Nicdao Jr., media representative; and Mayor Ramon Guico, Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines representative.

The PPS was cited by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) mission director Jon Lindborg as key to the many problems affecting important infrastructure projects.

Lindborg is among the business leaders and donor community members who are bullish and enthusiastic about the recent unprecedented developments and improvements in the country's infrastructure projects, Remonde said.

He cited the administration's Roll-on, Roll-off (Ro-Ro) network of roads and boat terminals as very beneficial for Filipinos.

USAID and other private corporations commended the government for what they called impressive developments in Mindanao and the country, Remonde said.

Remonde added that the outpouring of support and confidence for the government's infrastructure development efforts and the country's economic performance as a whole is very inspiring.

"The high positive note struck by our development partners and sectors augur well for the infrastructure program," he said. "The spirit of partnership, unity and commitment on display makes a convincing argument that today is indeed the best time to invest in the Philippines." – ***Paolo Romero***